

How Do High School Students Justify Internet Plagiarism?

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Internet plagiarism continues unabated and may even be increasing. Questions pertaining to the ethical–moral construct employed by students to justify Internet plagiarism among high school students have remained relatively untouched. Understanding not simply the prevalence of Internet plagiarism but also the variety of explanations used by students to justify their plagiarism seems crucial to curtailing its practice. In this study, I surveyed 160 high school students and endeavored to understand and describe the practices of students who use the Internet for schoolwork and who engage in copy–paste plagiarism or paper-buying practices. The results indicate that students are more easily able to justify copy–paste plagiarism for a variety of reasons that mirror justifications of other forms of conventional plagiarism. Most students indicated they would never purchase a paper for reasons ranging from fear of getting caught to more principled and nuanced ethical claims. Based on these results I also offer educators suggestions for refining assignments and evaluation methods.

Keywords: integrity, cheating, high school, plagiarism, Internet

As with any kind of dishonesty, plagiarism has always been with us. From particular lyrics of Shakespeare and T. S. Eliot to, as recently suggested, core concepts in Wittgenstein's monumental *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*¹ and the writings of H. G. Wells, it is not hard to find examples of the cribbing of ideas, words, and intellectual property (Goldstein, 1999, 2002; McKillop, 2002; Moss, 2005). Recent controversies surrounding the originality of passages in books by historians Stephen Ambrose and Doris Kearns Goodwin, stories by *New York Times* journalist

¹See Cohen (2001) for a response to this controversial assertion by Goldstein (1999).

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Jayson Blair, and the recalled novel by Harvard undergraduate Kaavya Viswanathan (Zhou, 2006) remind us that plagiarists can be anyone—dwellers of college library carrels and dorm rooms, feature writers at national newspapers, or Pulitzer Prize winners.

The prevalence of academic transgressions has been systematically researched since William Bowers's (1964) foundational study of college students. The last 25 years have seen a flurry of research—from empirical and psychosocial studies to philosophical inquiries—centered on how and why students cheat, whether interventions such as honor codes are successful in abating cheating, and how the advent of the Internet and other digital technologies have changed the way students cheat (McCabe, 1992; McCabe & Treviño, 1993; McCabe, Treviño, & Butterfield, 2001; Pavela & McCabe, 1993; Stephens, Young, & Calabrese, this issue).

Most of the research on the various facets of academic integrity and cheating have focused on undergraduate students, have been survey based, and have provided valuable insights into the problem of college cheating. Indeed, there is now a robust literature describing cheating behaviors in specific undergraduate majors such as business and engineering (Harding, Carpenter, Finelli, & Passow, 2004; McCabe, Dukerich, & Dutton, 1991). Further studies have described the frequency of cheating, moral development, and attitudes regarding dishonesty among graduate business, law, and medical students as well as university faculty (Baldwin, Daugherty, Rowley, & Schwartz, 1996; Branch, 2000; Brown, 1995; McCabe et al., 1991; Wajda-Johnston, Handal, Brawer, & Fabricatore, 2001). These studies have also reliably established the correlation between demographic factors such as age and gender and the prevalence of cheating behavior, as well as the influence of peer behavior (McCabe et al., 2001).

Several theoretical models have grounded research programs investigating plagiarism and academic dishonesty. As Wowra (this issue) and Stephens et al. (this issue) discuss, students who openly admit to both conventional and digital cheating might be demonstrating a thought-action split between their normative ideals and actual behavior, described in the context of delinquency as neutralization (Sykes & Matza, 1957) or in the organizational setting as slippage (Gibson, 2000). Previous research suggests that understanding the neutralization strategies employed by students who justify cheating is critical to fostering environments of academic integrity or pursuing the (less desirable) option of policing to prevent or punish cheating (McCabe, 1992). Adding philosophical complexity, phenomenological accounts of cheating offer insight into the lived experience and meaning of plagiarism for individual students who describe "plagiarism" as a slippery, value-laden term, with distinct meanings as it unfolds within their own unique, temporal, and sociocultural milieu (Ashworth, Freewood, & Macdonald, 2003).

One urgent, albeit nascent, area of academic integrity research has been to examine and understand student use of the Internet and other digital technologies. In 1999, McCabe found that 10% of surveyed undergraduate students admitted to

copy-paste plagiarism. Results from a 2001 study indicated over 40% of undergraduates surveyed engaged in copy-paste plagiarism, most of whom did not consider it serious. In this issue of *Ethics & Behavior*, Stephens et al. present a comparison of digital and conventional cheating behaviors of various kinds and have found that, although most cheating is accomplished by digital and conventional means in tandem, digital plagiarism (i.e., copy-paste plagiarism) stands out as an exclusive form of digital cheating.

In seeking to complement the research on digital cheating among undergraduate students, the goal of this study was twofold: (a) to present a qualitative account of explanations offered by high school students who have plagiarized from Internet resources, and (b) to describe how their justifications might lead to the development of more appropriate interventions or pedagogical techniques that will help students avoid Internet plagiarism. Because students cheat or witness cheating in high school and such behavior may be sustained into college, examining how high school students justify Internet plagiarism is important to preventing misconduct at the university level and possibly beyond into the workplace (Harding et al., 2004; McCabe et al., 2001).

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AND CHEATING

Studies examining both the prevalence of cheating and the reasons high school students cheat have typically utilized survey techniques and closed-response questions. One study involving undergraduate engineering majors found that more than half of those surveyed recollected cheating "a few times" during an average high school term (Harding et al., 2004). From 2001 to 2005, through a series of large multicenter studies of more than 18,000 students, McCabe (2005) with the Center for Academic Integrity (2005) found "cheating is ... a significant problem in high school. ... Over 60% [of students] admitted to some form of plagiarism. ... About half of all students admitted they had engaged in some level of plagiarism using the Internet."

In a series of focus groups held in 1999, McCabe found high school students were not hesitant to discuss candidly issues surrounding academic integrity, despite the fact that cheating was generally not talked about after the 1st day of class or orientation (McCabe, 1999). Most of the focus group participants admitted to cheating themselves and knowing of cheating by their peers. Their comments clearly indicated that they did not feel cheating was a significant concern. Further, statements by these students reinforced the findings of previous research that show cheating gets easier as students continue to cheat and that students are not really concerned about being caught (McCabe, 1999). It is important to note that participants said they felt they possessed a level of technological sophistication their

teachers lacked, making it easy and tempting to plagiarize from the Internet (McCabe, 1999).

COPY-PASTE PLAGIARISM

By now it is well known that the Internet, search engines, and instant electronic communications have given students an unprecedented amount of accessible information and materials for school projects as well as opportunity for collaboration on homework, tests, and in-class discussion. A recent study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2005) indicated that close to 90% of students ages 12 to 17 use the Internet, with most students and their parents believing the Internet helps them do well in school. A survey by DeBell and Chapman (2001) indicated that 72% of adolescent students use the Internet for schoolwork. Indeed, it is quite possible that most students now lack a fundamental knowledge of library-based research methods, such as the Library of Congress Classification or the Dewey Decimal System. Use of these traditional conventions of library science has been supplanted by the innovation of Web-based search engine suites like Google. Students neither riffle through long drawers of index cards to find resources nor run searches against databases stored on CD or tape as they once did. Rather, students are now able to instantaneously access millions upon millions of resources with a few keystrokes and a click. This type of research, although often haphazard, may in some cases be perfectly appropriate and ultimately helpful in completing an assignment.

Along the profound capabilities the Internet affords students to learn and collaborate come difficulties in the way in which resources are used. The overwhelming accessibility of written work (at one time it was unimaginable that millions of documents on a single subject matter could be accessed in less than 1 sec) has propelled plagiarism to the top of the list of academic integrity infractions. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines *plagiarism* as “to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one’s own; use (another’s production) without crediting the source.” Plagiarism may also refer to a continuum of activities in which a person lifts text verbatim or ideas without proper reference to the source of the material. Sometimes plagiarism is intentional, other times it is arguably the result of *cryptomnesia*—the unconscious appropriation of another author’s work by a plagiarist who thinks the work they are producing is original (Roig, 2001). The quickness and ease of copying and pasting text from a Web page makes it more likely that cryptomnesia might occur. Often plagiarism results from student confusion about what constitutes plagiarism, paraphrasing, content synthesis, and proper citation (Guiliano, 2000; McCabe, 2005). As McCabe (2005) states,

Internet plagiarism is a growing concern on all campuses as students struggle to understand what constitutes acceptable use of the Internet. In the absence of clear direction from faculty, most students have concluded that “cut & paste” plagiarism—using a sentence or two (or more) from different sources on the Internet and weaving this information together into a paper without appropriate citation—is not a serious issue.

Indeed, the question of whether the direct use string of a few words constitutes plagiarism or warranted paraphrasing is still somewhat open, as Roig (2001), citing Rathus (1993), explains:

In fact, my undertaking of a nonexhaustive search for an operational definition of correct paraphrasing has resulted in only one reference that prescribes a specific minimum number of words that a correct paraphrase should have in common with its original source. Under a section titled “Avoid Plagiarism,” Rathus (1993) wrote, “You can usually use a brief string (say two or three words) of your source’s writing without using quotation marks.”

Copy–paste plagiarism therefore was conceptualized in this study as the use of one or more complete sentences.

TERM PAPER PURCHASING

Although search engines may provide content and opportunity for less blatant kinds of plagiarism such as copy–paste plagiarism, other Internet-based “research” techniques are not so innocent. The proverbial fraternity term paper files are now open to the world and offer papers on every subject to any student with access to a credit card and an Internet connection. These papers are available on Web sites like *cheathouse.com*, *schoolsucks.com*, or one site with the ironic moniker *non-plagiarized-termpapers.com* (Clayton, 1997). The irony continues at *fastpapers.com*, where an undergraduate philosophy student can download a paper entitled “Aristotle on the Acquisition of Virtue” or a sociology student might buy “Sociological Explanations of Cheating.” These Web sites cynically offer and guarantee “nonplagiarized papers” for about \$15 per page and have spawned a virtual arms race pitting paper-download sites and the students who use them against teachers bent on authenticating term papers armed with plagiarism detection applications such as *turnitin.com*. Murray (2002) reported one student offered a unique justification for purchasing term papers based on private property and their “right” as a consumer: “If I buy this paper it’s my property, and I am turning in my property to the professor” (p. 23).

Because term paper assignments are the mainstay of college coursework, it seems less likely that most high school students have faced the decision about whether to purchase a term paper. Nevertheless, questions regarding paper-purchasing practices were included in this study to explore the prevalence of paper purchasing among high school students and to add relief to the explanations of students who engage in copy-paste plagiarism.

METHOD

Recruitment Procedure

During the 2004–05 academic year, high school teachers and administrators from Philadelphia and Pittsburgh area schools were contacted. A letter of inquiry was sent to teachers and administrators asking if they would be interested in surveying their students for a research study on academic integrity and Internet use. Five schools were selected as survey sites. Two were public schools, two were private schools, and one was a Catholic school in the Philadelphia Archdiocese.

Instrument

The researcher developed an instrument to assess student Internet use, specifically copy-paste plagiarism and their purchasing of term papers. The survey contained a set of filter questions with 19 fixed response and open-ended questions. It was designed to be concise, with students able to complete it in about 20 min of class time. A first draft was administered in a pilot study to approximately 30 students, after which focus groups with students were conducted to assess the instrument's comprehensiveness and clarity. Reflecting previous studies involving high school students and focus groups, students were remarkably willing to discuss their experiences with cheating (McCabe, 1999) and provided very helpful input on how to clarify survey questions and the protocol. The instrument was further refined based on this feedback. The Institutional Review Board at the researcher's institution reviewed and approved the final survey instrument and protocol after certain demographic questions were removed.

Participants and Administration

Invitations for participation in the study were sent to teachers and administrators who were previously involved in an ethics education outreach project at the researcher's institution. Students in Grades 9 to 12 were given parental permission forms 1 week before the survey was to be administered. The surveys were adminis-

tered during class time after the presentation of an introductory statement outlining the study goals, assurance of anonymity, and option to opt out of the taking the survey. Because the survey was administered during a planned class period, the number of respondents was close to 100% of those students who were present. A few students were absent on the particular survey days, did not return a parental consent form, or opted out of the survey.

RESULTS

Copy–Paste Plagiarism

Of 160 respondents, 58% indicated that they use the Internet 2 to 4 hr a day, with cumulative percent of 82.5% indicating they use up to half of online time for school work. Ninety-eight percent of respondents indicated they had used the Internet for homework or a research paper.

Approximately 54% indicated that they always mention where they located information used in assignments. Approximately 35% of respondents indicated that they had directly copied and pasted material into an assignment, without citation. Of these students (57), approximately 46% indicated they considered it plagiarism or cheating. This subset was asked to describe the reasons why they copy–paste plagiarized. They were given a set of fixed responses and asked to check all that apply (Table 1) as well as a field for an open response, which are presented in Table 2 and classified according to previously identified justifications.

TABLE 1
Students' Justifications for Copy–Paste Plagiarism

<i>Response^a</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>% of All Respondents</i>
I felt I had no time to do my own paper.	16	28.1
I felt unprepared to write the paper on my own.	15	26.3
I was not interested in the subject of my paper.	12	21.1
If I wasn't allowed to do it, the teacher should have explicitly said so.	8	14.0
I knew I would not get caught.	7	12.3
I think it is okay to use papers from the Internet.	5	8.8
If I wasn't allowed to do it, someone should make it impossible to do.	4	7.0
I think it's fun to beat the system.	4	7.0
I felt like my teacher would not care.	4	7.0
Some of my friends or classmates do it.	3	5.3
I did not respect my teacher.	2	3.5

^a*n* = 57.

TABLE 2
Other Reasons Given for Copy–Paste Plagiarism

<i>Response</i>	<i>Justification</i>
“I am not good at writing papers at all.”	Confidence
“I had no other way to write the phrase so I just copy and paste.”	Confidence
“I copy and paste just to get an idea then I change the words around.”	Paraphrasing
“What is the point of retyping something if it will sound exactly the same.”	Confidence
“What I find on the Internet can be found in thousands of places. Do you expect me to give you a list of thousands of sources?”	Confusion
“It was important information for my paper.”	Necessary
“I never used a lot, maybe a few lines.	Paraphrasing
“I change the words around anyway. I only take new information, not anyone’s beliefs or ideas.”	Paraphrasing
“I found that the information was a good addition to my paper!”	Confidence
“It’s easier.”	Ease
“I didn’t feel like doing it. Too much expected, I can’t do everything and people only care about A’s.”	Incompetence
“During that time I had to do two essays and a report for Bio. It became easier if I quickly copied the section of mitosis.”	Ease
“And I believe if its no more than 4 or 5 sentences, its not plagiarism. Whole papers yes but what I do, no.”	Paraphrasing
“Just to get some information. Not an entire paper.”	Paraphrasing
“When I used to do it, I knew my friends did it and that could mean, if I didn’t use it, that my friends would have a better paper.”	Peer Pressure
“It is usually for vocab[ulary] ... definitions are facts. So it’s not plagiarism to copy-paste definitions.”	Paraphrasing
“It is not like I copy the page. I usually copy dates, names and city names. It sounds to me that is easier then writing it.”	Paraphrasing/ Ease
“I copy and pasted but changed around what the info said.”	Paraphrasing
“How things were worded explained things perfectly and I felt if anything was changed my point wouldn’t have gotten across.”	Confidence

Paper Purchasing

Three students (2%) said they had handed in a paper that they had purchased on-line. Two of these students indicated they purchased a paper because their grade needed “a boost” and they felt unprepared to complete the assignment. One student indicated having bought a paper because he or she was never told not to.

The 156 (98%) students who said they had never purchased a paper were asked why. Many students responded by indicating that they were well aware it was cheating (e.g., “That is cheating, bad cheating” and “Blatant cheating”), did not want to pay for a paper, thought they could write a better paper, and were afraid of being caught. Several students described reasons in terms of combinations of these four broad categories. Selected responses are reported in the matrix in Table 3.

TABLE 3
Selected Reasons Given for not Purchasing Papers

<i>It is Cheating</i>	<i>Won't/Can't Pay</i>	<i>Can Do Better Work</i>	<i>Risky/Will Get Caught</i>
It is cheating	—	"I trust my own work more and would not want to be caught cheating like that."	"It would not be my own work and the school would find out if I plagiarized and I would be suspected."
Won't/Can't pay	"I'm not going to waste money on something I can do myself. I would be cheating myself."	—	"Because it costs money, which isn't worth it. There is also the possibility that someone else is handing in the same paper."
Can do better work	"It is plagiarism and I believe I can do a better job myself."	—	"I write well enough on my own. When I write, I try to remember that some teachers are likely to ask you to read your paper aloud. So I wouldn't use words I don't understand facts or ideas my 'peers' I won't understand."
Risky/Will get caught	"This would be cheating. There are, also, huge consequences if you get caught."	"I don't know any web sites, I think I could get caught somewhat easily. And I think I would do better on my own."	—

DISCUSSION

Attitudes Regarding Copy–Paste Plagiarism

Students' justifications for engaging in copy–paste plagiarism reflected the broad domains of neutralization strategies for other kinds of cheating described elsewhere (McCabe, 1992), and the attitudes expressed by students who engaged in copy–paste plagiarism were aligned with those attitudes identified in previous studies.

No time. The top choice of respondents (“I felt I had no time”) is a typical justification for plagiarism. Although this justification was *prima facie* expected based on previous findings and might be the end of the story, further analysis is needed. Do students who express that they have no time to complete an assignment possess more complex underlying beliefs or worries? Perhaps “no time” implies that they are not interested in the assignment or subject matter, that they have not prioritized the assignment or course appropriately to allow for sufficient work time, that they feel that their teachers do not constructively evaluate their work, that they simply have not been mentored in proper time management, or they truly are overtaxed by the very high expectations of contemporary high school life. Additionally, it is reasonable to intuit that the worries expressed by students who said they have no time to complete an assignment grade into related justifications that students feel unprepared or they are uninterested in the subject. The relationship between these justifications was not specifically measured in this study.

Everybody's doing it. The claim that everybody's doing it represents a constellation of related justifications for academic dishonesty (among many other sundry behaviors). These include “because others are doing it, it is okay” (described as the “when in Rome” justification by Gibson, 2000); “if I don't do it, others will get ahead”; and “if I don't do it, someone else will.” As Stephens et al. (this issue) and McCabe et al. (2001) have described, these justifications represent an instance of moral disengagement described by Bandura's (1986) social learning theory and reflect Asch's (1955) findings about majority influence and peer pressure (Gibson, 2000).

The use of this set of justifications is no different in the present study context of copy–paste plagiarism, although it appears significantly less often in responses by study participants than what might be expected from previous studies. Copy–paste plagiarism is remarkably fast, takes very little effort, and occurs within the relatively private interface of user and computer. These factors might limit students' knowledge of their peers' copy–paste practices, because students probably do not go out of their way to admit to their peers that they copied and pasted portions of assignments. There might in fact be a conspiracy of silence around this particular

cheating behavior; everyone does it but it remains unspoken. Another possibility for why this justification was not as high as expected could be the nature of the explanation itself as group dependent. If a class happens to have a low incidence of cheating, this will be reflected across all samples taken from that class, thereby amplifying the result. It is also likely that the low incidence of this justification could be an artifact of the relatively small sample size in this study.

No clear policy. Several student responses reflect a lack of clarity regarding what exactly their school's policy says regarding copy–paste practices. Indeed, this response reflects the confusion students have about plagiarism, even in settings with policy statements provided by teachers verbally, in syllabi, or on Web sites.

Attitudes Regarding Paper Purchasing

The contrast between the prevalence and comments regarding paper purchasing versus copy–paste plagiarism indicates a continuum of cheating behaviors high school students deem acceptable or unacceptable. Interestingly, several students indicated that they could do better work than that offered by a purchased paper. This response is contrary to those given by students who said that they could do no better than a phrase or sentence they found online to justify copy–paste plagiarism. Respondents indicated that they understood both copy–paste plagiarism and paper purchasing were cheating but were clearly more steadfast in their belief that paper purchasing was much worse, even identifying the degree to which they considered paper purchasing cheating: “That is completely wrong and that would mean that 100% of it was cheating. I truly hate to cheat and really rarely ever do it.”

Such responses reflect previous findings indicating students view the severity of cheating on a continuum. For example, using a crib sheet during a test is considered less severe than, say, taking another student's test sheet and copying answers their answers without consent (Johnston, 1991). The perceived severity of paper purchasing presents a stark contrast to the perceived severity of copy–paste plagiarism. It would seem the difference in perceived severity turns on several factors, most of which are more pragmatic than ethical: the ease with which one can engage in the behavior, the elevated risk of being caught, and the actual amount of intellectual property being illicitly appropriated.

First of all, I wouldn't pay for something I could do myself. And second of all, I think it would be obviously not mine. There's also the chance it would be wrong or I'd be caught not knowing what it is. You wouldn't learn anything that way.

It is hard to find something that is the exact topic of your paper. I have no money to buy papers. It's a waste of hard earned money to waste.

The chances of a teacher knowing it is not my writing are very high. Teachers are familiar with the writing styles of their students.

Several students presented more nuanced ethical claims indicating they understood paper purchasing to be wrong because it undermined their own educational goals and damaged the integrity of their own academic community.

I like writing and doing my own work, and cheating isn't fair to me or my classmates (and the teacher as well).

I don't think it is right, because a research project should be in your own words. Also the point of a research paper is to learn and you don't learn from purchasing it.

I try to understand everything I can about the paper and I don't learn anything by copying.

Because the point of homework is to learn and practice the material and researching. You would only hurt yourself by cheating.

It is precisely these students who McCabe and Pavela (2000) might consider peer leaders and who might become instrumental in establishing an honor code and council.

Teachers' Understandings of Internet Plagiarism

Although not measured here, teachers' perceptions of plagiarism have a significant influence on their students' attitudes and behaviors (Dant, 1986). Indeed a teacher's confusion about what exactly constitutes plagiarism may result in students actually being encouraged to plagiarize (Dant, 1986). A study conducted on conventional plagiarism found that close to 17% of students were being actively encouraged by their teachers to directly copy. These students reported receiving conflicting instructions from teachers and not surprisingly were confused about plagiarism (Dant, 1986). Such confusion was reflected in several of the students' responses in the present study.

Particularly because of the ubiquitous opportunities for digital content and the reported asymmetry in technical sophistication between student and teacher, there is more room for teacher instructional error vis-à-vis the nature of Internet plagiarism and what constitute acceptable and unacceptable practices. It remains important to critically examine the standards utilized by teachers when addressing the specifics of acceptable paraphrasing and copy-paste practices; this was an area not addressed by this study. Although interventions to curtail student cheating through education and policing of students are important, training of teachers about the

concept of plagiarism in combination with instruction about the latest technology, including search engines and peer-to-peer communication tools, is also key.

Suggestions for the Prevention of Internet Plagiarism

McCabe et al. (2001) offered a number of strategies for managing cheating in the classroom. These strategies include effectively communicating expectations to being fair, respectful, and supportive of students; empowering student leaders to teach their peers; and refining evaluation structures to deemphasize the grade and to focus on learning. These strategies map onto the 10 Principles of Academic Integrity developed by McCabe and Pavela (1997, 2004). The value of several of these suggestions was reinforced by the results of the present study. Aside from the broad goal of fostering a culture and environment of integrity, two specific interventions might help to curtail copy-paste and paper-purchasing plagiarism: reconceptualizing traditional writing assignments and demanding synthesis.

Although the challenge of Internet plagiarism is quite daunting, its widespread prevalence presents educators with the opportunity for critical reevaluation of pillars of high school and undergraduate pedagogy, namely, rhetorical writing assignments sometimes considered to be “empty exercises.” As Hunt (2002) argued,

If the apprehension that it's almost impossible to escape the mass-produced and purchased term paper leads teachers to create more imaginative, and rhetorically sound, writing situations in their classes, the advent of the easily-purchased paper from schoolsucks.com is a salutary challenge to practices which ought to be challenged.

High school teachers should seek to craft assignments that are not simply rote research tasks but rather encourage and engender a sense of student ownership of the resulting product. This can be accomplished by leveraging technology toward the learning experience and not simply as a tool used exclusively for content mining. Instead of assigning a term paper on specific topics—topics that can now be addressed by the staff at custom paper mills within hours—assignments that include Web page development, slide show presentations, or collaborative wiki technology might offer alternatives.

Teachers should also require evidence of content synthesis. Requiring students to present their projects to the class in their own words is one way to accomplish this. This idea is substantiated by cognitive tests that have been used to detect and deter plagiarism. For example the Cloze test traditionally has been used to assess readability and language comprehension by replacing a set number or frequency of words with a standard-sized blank line. Examinees must then fill in the missing words based on their understanding of the context of the sentence (Glatt & Haertel, 1982; Murray, 2002). Teachers can conduct an impromptu Cloze test by asking students to describe their research and writing in their own words. The usefulness

of this method was reflected in student responses to paper purchasing (e.g., “when I write, I try to remember that some teachers are likely to ask you to read your paper aloud”).

Finally, plagiarism detection systems such as Turnitin.com and EVE2 are becoming institutional information technology fixtures, allowing instructors to identify and possibly deter instances of plagiarism. These systems can also be configured to permit students to check their own papers prior to submission, providing students with real-time feedback on their writing. Although these systems are of value, instructors should be aware that they are not a panacea. If used inappropriately, detection systems can erode a culture of trust and integrity. Students might incorrectly interpret the system feedback, believing that plagiarism is simply a matter of degree of acceptable paraphrasing. They will miss the point that they should both understand and synthesize their research.

Student groups who have openly criticized detection systems have recently raised serious objections. They argue that through the use of these systems they are tacitly presumed guilty of cheating. As one student reported to the *Washington Post*, “I feel like I have to prove I’m not cheating. ... I can’t just be trusted to say I didn’t cheat in the first place” (Glod, 2006, p. A01). Not surprisingly, litigation has also followed. For-profit companies such as Turnitin are coming under fire for their use of large databases that store and compare students’ papers—an alleged violation of intellectual property rights (Glod, 2006).

Study Limits and the Need for Further Research

Although the results of this study offer insights into student justifications of Internet plagiarism, it was limited in several ways. First, as with any study on cheating that depends on self-reporting, it is possible respondents were not completely forthcoming or honest in answering some questions (Wowra, this issue). Despite the assurance of anonymity by the researcher, students may have worried that their answers were being monitored or were somehow linked to them. Second, a larger sample size and a more detailed instrument would have strengthened the results and allowed for further inferential analyses. The survey instrument was very short because it was given during regular class time. Third, the survey itself might have been confusing to students. Although revised pursuant to student focus group recommendations, the survey may have still been confusing to some, as is evidenced by particular samples where students skipped questions they were directed to answer. Fourth, to strengthen qualitative findings, one follow-up strategy would be to present findings to student focus groups to gather additional feedback on open-ended responses. This method might offer interesting results when presenting to focus groups the responses of students from different schools. Finally, two highly selective private schools were included in the survey. Based on reports

by McCabe (2001), students from private schools describe a lower incidence in cheating, and this sampling technique might have skewed the data.

This study both reinforces findings of research on Internet plagiarism and, more broadly, adds to the tapestry of academic integrity research already accomplished. The results show that students find copy–paste plagiarism to be much less problematic than paper purchasing, and students who engage in copy–paste plagiarism deploy a number of justifications for doing it. Students in this study argued strongly against paper purchasing, recognizing it both as impractical and unethical. These findings can help educators remain cognizant of Internet plagiarism and refine their assignment and evaluation methods to constructively utilize the technology that their students are already adept in using.

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